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ABSTRACT

Community education programs in rural areas come up against a different set of problems than their counterparts in urban areas. These problems seem to cluster into three categories: communication, the "so what phenomenon," and the form or substance of the idea. Observations of programs in South Dakota suggest that some characteristics cut across successful models. Most of the successful programs have one of these factors or features: program leadership, program security, and support or "innovations" networks. One of the programs has combined the programming efforts of the parks and recreation department into the school-based community education program, and this administrative configuration has provided a basis for seeking and getting financial support from other sources. Another program demonstrates the ways in which a director can work to involve the full spectrum of the community through the program. A third program is working to change the community's perception of itself as a resource through educational programs. The benefits and rewards for innovations and innovative practices provide sufficient motivation of staff and personnel that, in turn, generates more ideas and innovations. (Questions and answers are included. A listing of four innovative programs is appended.) (YLB)

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Innovative Models of Community Education

Programs in Rural Areas

Ontario Community Education Association

Laurentian University - Sudbury, Ontario-Canada

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Presented

by

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(Introductory remarks and comments)

The remarks in this presentation are somewhat related to a handout titled "Innovative Programs Listing" Extra copies are available and may be used in any way that is helpful.

The comments that follow are a result of observations that have been made about the Community Education programs found in the communities of the State of South Dakota and may or may not be applicable to other programs. I would hope that like many ideas and suggestions it's possible to pick and choose from this information and hopefully find something that can be used in some way.

Innovations have been a topic of study for a time and there are several good works that a person can draw from and use to grasp the basic concepts. Persons interested in the practical applications can find a substantial amount of information that has been developed over the years by the U.S. Cooperative Extension Services affiliated with the land grant institutions. The extension service has done a lot of work in the area of adoption and diffusion. The second source of valuable information is in the work by Rogers and Shoemaker. This is found in their publication "The Communication of Innovations". The third source is work done by Columbia University from 1971 to 1973 in Project

IDEA (Innovation Dissemination for the Education of Adults). All of these works are very helpful and useful for persons examining innovative models.

Rural programs come up against a different set of problems than their counterparts in urban areas. Geographical isolation and remoteness contribute to a different set of problems for the practitioner. These problems seem to cluster into the following three categories:

1. Communication problems sometimes created by mixed information and distorted messages about practices. This means that the way in which someone tells us about a new idea and the reality of the idea or practice is sometimes significantly different. This need not be intentional, sometimes it just happens that way.
2. The "so what phenomenon" is another problem area. This means the introduction of innovations in programs at times ius difficult because the particular innovation may not be seen as particularly innovative. Iinstead it may be viewed on the part of the person in charge as "just a way of doing the job" and not particularly innovative or a new idea.
3. The third problem area has to do with the form or substance of the idea. The innovation as it stands, may not be in a form that is easily disseminated or useable in other similar programs in other areas. In some cases it just won't work.

This then brings us to the point of examining the ingredients of successful "models". My observations of the South Dakota Programs suggest that are some characteristics that cut across programs. These programs in our region and area are characterized by several features that almost appear to be generic. These features or factors are; program leadership, program security, and support or"innovations"networks. It looks like most of the successful programs have at least one or more of these factors. Ideally all three would be present to some degree, In reality,it looks like most programs only have one and some semblance of a second factor present.

In order to better understand features each one needs to have some additional explanation as to their meaning and an understanding of what they stand consist of,in part.

1. <u>Program leadership</u> consists of the risk taking decision making, and creative skills that a person demonstrates in the design, implementation and operation of a program. Practically speaking this means that the coordinator or program director is willing to try new course offerings, or types of courses, modes of delivery, and other related risk taking actions. Several of the programs in the handout demonstrate leadership. The decision making skills in the community education programs observed usually are consensual in nature and usually involve advisory committees and/or task forces. Creative skills include the

ability to make combinations and a " repackage" off new or existing courses, programs and offerings that identify the program as innovative and stimulating.

2. Program Security is made up of the factors that create or ensure that programs are secure in relation to the sponsoring agency, as well as the community support of the program. Several of the programs in the listing demonstrate security. It means that all parties understand, appreciate and are willing to support the efforts and activities of the program to the degree that the director/advisory committee and others in the program are willing to committ their time and resources. The program thereby demonstrates a measure of permanance and is secure in the sense that is not running day to day or week to week in order to survive. An important aspect of this is the way in which the program is perceived in the minds of the staff and especially the director or program coordinator.

3. Networks are the third aspect of innovative programs meaning that some sort of supporting network exists. This network can be small or large in the sense of numbers and make-up of the network. Usually this consists of peers but in some cases this consists of a mix of peers and experts or resource persons. Essentially this represents an"innovations network".

Innovative programs don't seem to be too closely realated to other factors that sort out the so-called "successful project or program". That is, the size, location, cultural, or environmental factors are not as critical. For example, we find that small programs, remote rural programs and programs found on American Indian reservations are innovative in some ways. Their impact as innovators though, varies. Some do not perceive themselves as innovative yet they appear to be very innovative and creative in some of the things that they have been able to do. At times they serve as models or examples for other programs.

There are some false assumptions that are easily made when one wants to innovate or develop innovative programs. One of the prevailing false assumptions that program directors start out with is the assumption that a large budget and unlimited resources are needed to be innovative. In reality some of the programs with very meager financial resources are innovative.

Another false assumption is the idea that the size of a program is important to the innovativeness of a program. This is not necessarily true and in some cases in our area it can be said that the smaller programs are more innovative. This might be a slightly misleading factor in our area since the programs across the state are for the most part small programs.

The handout of Innovative Program Listings provides some interesting insights into these differences and can be seen in the listing of programs. From this the differences and similarities can be examined as well as a review of the other characteristics.

To better grasp an understanding of the "Innovative Models" in our area it is helpful to highlight some of the aspects of the programs. Here are a few of those "highlights".

One of the programs has combined the programming efforts of the parks and recreation department into the school-based community education program and this administrative configuration has provided a basis for seeking out and getting financial support from other sources, including local business and financial institutions. At a time when most programs look to funding sources and programming with funds from existing and familiar sources this program has some particularly creative options. The offerings in this program also reflect a creativeprogramming effort including both the regular programs and summer community education programs.

Another program that is unique in its responsiveness demonstrates the ways in which a director can work to involve the full spectrum of the community through the program. This means the implementation of activities such as a Community Theater that involves the age, socioeconomic, and educational continuum of that community.

A third program that utilizes an innovative approach to its operation is a small rural program that is working to change the communitys' perception of its self as a resource through educationalprograms. While this isn't the only priority and thrust of the program. Much of the educational programming activities and cooperative projects that use the services of the cooperative extension and other resources, the director of the

program is working to change the communities outlook. This includes educational programs that are community forums on "Problems of Bringing Industry to Town", and the use of the school library as a community library.

An important dimension of the success of these programs is the previously mentioned factors of program leadership, program security, and an innovations support network. The coordinators of these programs provide significant leadership in terms of decision making and risk taking. They are willing and do take risks and make decision about their programs. The programs are secure in the sense that they have the support of the sponsoring agency or organization, they have the community support and the administrative support of their activities. The support network provides the means for communication and dialogue about new ideas and improvements that facilitate the operation and utilization of the community education program. At the present time the Community Education Development Center at the University plays a role in fostering the growth of regional meetings in which the directors in the region discuss, examine and share ideas. This encourages networking.

In conclusion, there are several recommendations that are important to mention in terms of promoting the idea of getting people to be more creative and s innovative. There are probably others but here are some:

1. Promote the idea of innovative programming, innovative operation and innovations in general.

2. Ensure that communication channels are open and easily used by all parties at all levels in all programs across the state.

3. Promote and recognize innovations and innovative programs through word of mouth and contact as well as the more traditional means of recognition in print at professinal meetings and special awards.

The benefits and rewards for innovations and innovative practices provide sufficient motivation of staff and personnel that it seems to feed on itself and generate more ideas and innovations. Through this environment and the promotion of and innovative climate or a climate for innovation the quality and growth of program would seem to be certain. If this does not yield immediate short term financial gains it would certainly seem to yield long term gains and benefits if the quality of all programs. This goal or objective should be a mission of the community, the program and the personnel participating and supporting the program.

The next part of the program is open for questions, preferably directed to the listing previously distributed.

"How do you define innovative"?

The term is broadly defined. It's possible one can probably find many definitions. The point made by Rogers is critical from my view. That is, if it is innovative, the perception of "it" is important. If people see it as innovative, then that's the most important thing, whether it's a product or process.

"Does the length of time the program has been operating make a difference"?

I would have to make a guess about this without any data. I would suspect that a new program means a new set of perceptions. I also think that a new director or coordinator means that the perceptions of the program will be new, and the result is that the possibilities for viewing that particular community education programs' practices as innovative are rather high.

" What about the Indian programs ?

There has been some very creative programs on the Pine Ridge Reservation for dealing with the problems that the indian community has had to face. Especially those programs that have tried to perpetuate the Lakota culture. There have been all-day Indian Film Programs, Festivals, Special Events and other programs designed to preserve the"Indian Ways".

A program on another reservation has responded to the educational needs of the non-indian population and taken the educational offerings right into the non-indian, off-the-reservation communities.

Any other questions I will be glad to handle individually.

INNOVATIVE PROGRAM LISTING

Program # 1

Program Description: This program is a small rural program situated in an area that makes it less than an hours drive to a larger urban area. The Community Education program is relatively new, offers a broad selection of courses, provides programming for all ages and background. The staff participates in professional development programs. Has an advisory committee, and conducts an assessment of the communities needs.

Innovative Practices: Program leadership and program security come from diverse financial support in this program. The city , the school and the community find funds to keep a full-time director working on the community education program.

Size of Community: The population of the community is 1655 and draws from another 1000 persons in the surrounding rural areas, that includes other small communities.

Characteristics of program: Continious attention to new ideas for programs and offerings are part of this programs strengths. The full-time assignment for community education is important to the security of the program. It not only demonstrates community support but provides an impetus for maintaining a strong program.

Other: This program is perceived by other programs as a leader.

Program # 2

Program Description: This program is a small rural program located in the midst of other small rural communities. The population depends on agriculture and agriculturally related interests to keep the community alive.

Innovative Practices: The innovative way in which this small program is able to come up with small twists in the programming is especially creative. The use of the local veterinarian to teach animal care skills, and a field trip to the "city" for a play, followed by a "community theatre" production were all innovative ways of providing for the communitys'educational needs in a sparsely populated area.

Size of Community: The community has less than 475 and draws another 300 persons from the surrounding areas.

Characteristics of program: The program involves the total community with its offerings. The agricultural and the cultural interests of the community are responded to through the community education program.

Other: The support of the school is especially strong.

Program #3

Program Description: This program is a small rural program that has an older population and is remote in terms of its location. The pride of the community is apparent in its support of the school and its community education program. The school age population is declining and the town has one small industry that employs less than a dozen employees.

Innovative Practices: The activities through the community education program have sought to involve the community in the community education program and at the same time work at instilling pride in the community. The use of outside expertise in a program that helped the community to examine the effects of attracting new industry to the community was especially valuable. The outcome was for the community to see itself and the problems in the community from a different vantage point.

Size of Community: This community has less than 650 persons in the immediate area and serves another 400 in the surrounding area.

Characteristics of Program: The community education program involves the advisory committee and the school in the program to a great degree. The Director works very hard at participating in professional activities and is alert to new ideas, funding sources and programs.

Other The program gets a lot from a limited amount of resources.

Program #4

Program Description This program is located on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Central South Dakota. The transportation in the area is limited. The distances between towns is considerable. The program has a decentralized format for providing community programs and provides both on-reservation and off-reservation programming.

Innovative Practices: The leadership in this program used community based Television with a mobile van that televised local events then drive to the nearest high point of the land and rebroadcast the program for the rural residents. The willingness to find the way and to act on the delivery of credit college coursework off the reservation to non-indian populations is an example of innovative administrative practices.

Size of Community: Towns served by the program range from 100 to 3789 with the total area served by the program (including the reservation) is about 6200.

Characteristics of Program: The program leadership is an important ingredient of this program. There is a willingness to try new ideas, delivery of instruction and to go into new communities.

Other: There is not a high level of security in the program since some of the base is supported by federal sources.

Readings

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